

**Highland Park, IL** - U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk joined local mayors and representatives from the Navy and Openlands for an announcement and tour of the new *Openlands Lakefront Preserve at Fort Sheridan*, located on Lake Michigan's shoreline.

During a special signing ceremony near the new lakefront park, the Navy and Openlands signed a Memo of Agreement, transferring key Lake Michigan shoreline bluffs and ravines to Openlands, a 43-year-old conservation organization.

Kirk forged the partnership between the Navy and Openlands to preserve the bluffs and beaches. In 2004, Kirk won enactment of a federal law providing for the Navy to transfer ownership of the bluffs to a non-profit land conservation organization as part of the Department of Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 4200).

"Lake Michigan is a source of beauty and recreation for our communities," said Kirk. "I am dedicated to protecting her shores and preserving the bluffs for all future generations to enjoy. I want to recognize the Navy for being a good environmental steward. Their work with Openlands guarantees the creation of the Openlands Lakefront Preserve at Fort Sheridan so that key habitats on Lake Michigan's shoreline will be preserved permanently."

Joining Kirk at the announcement and tour were Jerry Adelman, Executive Director, Openlands, Captain Rame Hemstreet, Commanding Officer, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Midwest, John Ehle, Forest City Enterprises, Inc., Highland Park Mayor Michael Belsky and Highwood Mayor Vincent Donofrio.

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"Illinois is home to only 60 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline," said Congressman Kirk. "Less

than half of that lakefront property is open to the public. Our new park will protect the beachfront bluffs and preserve the Lake Michigan shoreline for all time.”

The new preserve is located at the southern end of Fort Sheridan. The shoreline and bluffs are home to several endangered species and used by thousands of migratory birds. Openlands is currently planning to restore this rare ecosystem while adding hiking and biking trails. Once complete, the new preserve will make more than one mile of Lake Michigan shoreline available to the public.

“Openlands has a long history of preserving important open space in the metropolitan region and the Fort Sheridan property presents an unparalleled opportunity to permanently protect a unique natural area,” said Jerry Adelman, executive director for Openlands. “Once our plans are implemented, this site will be a resource for environmental education and research as well as a place to hike, bike, bird watch and enjoy nature.”